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Contents

Editorial

For the most part, the papers in this volume tend to engage the theological task from a philosophical perspective. Contributions to the collection come from a variety of contextual and theological backgrounds and address a range of issues in baptistic theology, pedagogy, spirituality and history.

In her engaging essay originally presented at the opening of the academic year at IBTS, Prof Nancey Murphy presents a snapshot of her extensive research on the history of theories of human nature in the offshoots of Latin Christianity. Considering the most recent stirring philosophical advances and building on the insights of her earlier works, she is arguing for a thoroughly non-reductive account of human nature.

Prof Miroslaw Patalon's paper reflects on the findings of phenomenographic research conducted among high school teachers of religion in Poland. Continuing to explore the viability of process theology for the purposes of religious education and interrelations dialogue, he asserts that John Cobb's pedagogy of ecumenism provides a potent perspective for overcoming narrowness and isolationism in religious education.

The renowned Baptist historian Dr Albert Wardin reflects further (cf. *JEBS* 7:3) on the challenging and controversial question of the origins of the Baptist movement in Imperial Russia. Against the simplistic views that Baptists were either entirely a product of a foreign (particularly German) missionary implantation or an amalgamation of indigenous movements of dissent within Russian Orthodoxy initiated by natives and divorced from any western influences, he argues for the dialectical nature of the origins of the Baptist movement on Russian soil in which both foreign and indigenous elements were incorporated.

The last paper in this collection recognises the quality academic work of younger European Baptist scholars who have been working on their research degrees at IBTS. By complementing the strengths of McClendon's narrativism with Stassen's understanding of the ways in which discipleship, as described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, can be seen concretely as the embodiment of the vision of the kingdom of God, Joshua Searle offers a more integrated perspective on Christian spirituality and spiritual formation for the baptistic tradition.

The Revd Doc Dr Parush R Parushev,
Academic Dean, IBTS

How to Keep the 'Non' in Nonreductive Physicalism[1]

Introduction

In the course lectures I present at the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, each year, I examine differences between modern and postmodern philosophical assumptions in the Anglo-American world, and then point out the consequences of these changes for various areas of theological research. In my seminars so far I first considered epistemological changes, and the difference they make for understanding theological methodology. Secondly, I examined modern and postmodern theories of language. Thirdly, I lectured on human nature, tracing the history of body-soul dualism in Christian history, and arguing that a monist-wholist-physicalist account of human nature is more consistent with the Bible than dualism, and I also argued that it is a position more congruent with anabaptist theology than dualism.

In this paper, I want first to tie the dualism-physicalism issue to the modern-postmodern theme, and then present some of my own most recent work in philosophy that is a necessary accompaniment to biblical, theological and scientific arguments for physicalism. This is the issue of reductionism.

The connection with the issue of modern versus postmodern thought is as follows. At the beginning of the modern period (approximately 1650) there were two major options for understanding human nature. One was René Descartes's dualism of body and mind or soul. The other was Thomas Hobbes's reductive physicalism. That is, Hobbes denied the existence of a nonmaterial element constituting human nature, and asserted that human thought and behaviour could all be reduced to physics.

These two positions are still found today. However, in the past several decades, a new option has become available – non-reductive physicalism. This is the view that humans are indeed purely physical organisms, but their complex neural systems and culture are the sources of their rationality, morality, spirituality and free will.

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[1] The paper was presented as a public lecture at the Postgraduate Seminar in the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic on 3rd September 2008. Parts of this paper are adapted from material originally published in Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Nancey Murphy and Warren S. Brown, *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It?: Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

In this paper I shall present a tiny snapshot of the history of theories of human nature in the West, and then describe the exciting philosophical changes that are going on right now that make a thoroughly non-reductive account of human nature possible.

A Bit of History

To many a reader of today's media, it would appear that Christians have once again bowed to the authority of science; they are renouncing the dualist anthropology that has characterised their teaching from the beginning in order to adopt the physicalism that is consistent with current science, particularly cognitive neuroscience. However, the issue looks quite different to those of us who attended seminary sometime in the late twentieth century, and, more precisely, a seminary of a liberal sort. We are aware of the fact that the dualism-physicalism issue is already a century old in Christian biblical studies and history of doctrine.

In 1911, biblical scholar H. Wheeler Robinson argued persuasively that writers of the Hebrew scriptures were not dualists; their concept of human nature was monistic.[2] Later translators had read dualism *back into* the texts by employing, first, Greek anthropological terms, and then later translating these Greek terms into modern languages in ways that reflect their use by Greek philosophers. By the middle of the twentieth century it was commonplace to argue that New Testament authors also presupposed a monistic and physicalist account of human nature. Nonetheless, already in the second century, dualism began to appear in Christian teaching. *The Epistle to Diognetus* (written in approximately 130) described humans as possessing an immortal soul. By the time of Augustine, in the early fifth century, dualism of a modified Platonic sort was taken as the orthodox position.

Contemporary Jewish scholars appear to be divided on the question of dualism versus physicalism. A persuasive book, though, is Neil Gillman's *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought*.[3] Gillman argues that the only conception of human nature that fits comfortably with the Jewish understanding of life and of Jews' relation to God is a physicalist account, along with an emphasis on afterlife understood in terms of bodily resurrection.

So Christians have plenty of historical precedent for accepting a physicalist account of human nature, and it can be argued that in so doing

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[2] H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911).

[3] Neil Gillman, *The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1997).

they are not bowing to science at all, but are instead recovering a more authentic version of their own early teachings. What all religious believers need to worry about, however, is the extent to which a physicalist ontology is believed to entail a reductionistic account of human life. In the (in)famous words of Francis Crick: 'You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules'.[4] As already noted, it is this reductionist view that I shall address here.

Defeating Reductionism

Philosopher Richard Rorty claims that it is mental images and metaphors, rather than explicit theories, that most influence our philosophical positions. One image that has dominated modern thinking is that of the hierarchy of the sciences, with physics at the bottom, because it studies the most basic components of the physical world. Each science above it studies more complex composites or systems of these entities: Chemistry studies the atoms in compounds; biochemistry studies the highly complex compounds involved in living organisms. The various layers of biology study increasingly complex components of organisms. Psychology can be added to the list, as it studies the behaviour of the whole organism in its environment.

One of the most influential ideas carried forward from the work of the logical positivists in the 1920s was a plan for the unification of the sciences by showing that the human sciences could be added to the hierarchy, and then arguing that the laws of each science could be reduced to (i.e., be shown to be special cases of) the laws of the next lower discipline. In other words, the higher could be reduced to the lower in the sense that the behaviour of the higher-level entity could be explained in terms of the behaviour of its parts. The ultimate consequence would be that the behaviour of all of the entities in the universe could be shown to be a consequence of the laws of physics.

There are indeed many questions that arise at, say, the chemical level that can only be answered by means of knowledge of atomic physics, the level below. The success in explaining chemical reactions in terms of atomic physics was largely responsible for promoting this reductionist approach to science.

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[4] Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), p. 3.

However, we are now recognising that reducing a system to its parts usually only provides partial understanding. This should be common sense when we think about the human level. Much of who we are and what we do is affected by our biology – by our neural systems and genetics. However, (and here I quote sociologist Sal Restivo): 'We do great harm to ourselves and our planet if we rely on [natural scientists] for our self-image as persons and as a species. We are, indeed, thermodynamic systems and we run at some level according to the laws of physics, biology, and chemistry. But what we are above all is a social and cultural thing, a society, a social being. . . . We are, individually and collectively, social facts' (personal communication).

It is now increasingly the case that this phenomenon, referred to as top-down causation, applies equally among the natural sciences themselves. That is, we often need to move to a third level or higher to answer questions at level 2. Evolutionary biology is rife with examples of both bottom-up and top-down explanation. Mutations are explained primarily via physics and chemistry, while survival of an altered life form is largely explained environmentally; that is, in terms of factors germane to the science of ecology.

So the defeat of reductionism in general, and in particular the defeat of reductionism in our understanding of human beings, requires the development of the concept of *downward causation*. We need to show that we are not mere aggregates of our biological parts, but that we, as complex systems, in relation to our environment, are causal players in our own right, and that we have downward control over our own parts.

Developing a Concept of Downward Causation

Throughout the remainder of this lecture I shall be relying heavily on work I have done with my colleague, neuropsychologist Warren Brown, in our book *Did My Neurons Make Me Do It?: Philosophical and Neurobiological Perspectives on Moral Responsibility and Free Will.*[5]

The most cogent arguments against causal reductionism are those showing that, in many complex systems, the whole has reciprocal effects on its constituents. Donald Campbell and Roger Sperry both used the term 'downward causation' in the 1970s. Sperry often spoke of the properties of the higher-level entity or system *overpowering* the causal forces of the component entities.[6] Campbell's work has turned out to be more helpful.

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[5] Murphy and Brown, *Did My Neurons*.

[6] Roger W. Sperry, *Science and Moral Priority: Merging Mind, Brain, and Human Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 117.

Here there is no talk of overpowering lower-level causal processes, but instead a thoroughly non-mysterious account of a larger system of causal factors having a *selective* effect on lower-level entities and processes. Campbell's example is the role of natural selection in producing the remarkably efficient jaw structures of ants and worker termites.[7]

Downward causation is often invoked in current literature in psychology and related fields, yet it received little attention in philosophy after Campbell's essay in 1974. However, in 1995 Robert Van Gulick spelled out in more detail an account based on selection. The reductionist's claim is that the causal roles associated with higher-level scientific classifications are entirely derivative from the causal roles of the underlying physical constituents. Van Gulick concedes that the events and objects picked out by the special sciences *are* composites of physical constituents. However, he argues that the causal powers of such an object are *not* determined solely by the physical properties of its constituents and the laws of physics. They are also determined by the *organisation* of those constituents within the composite. And it is just such patterns of organisation that are picked out by the predicates of the higher-level sciences.

These patterns have downward causal efficacy in that they can affect which causal powers of their constituents are activated. 'A given physical constituent may have many causal powers, but only some subsets of them will be active in a given situation. The larger context (i.e. the pattern) of which it is a part may affect which of its causal powers get activated. . . . Thus the whole is not any simple function of its parts, since the whole at least partially determines what contributions are made by its parts.'[8]

Such patterns or entities are stable features of the world, often in spite of variations or exchanges in their underlying physical constituents. Many such patterns are self-sustaining or self-reproducing in the face of perturbing physical forces that might degrade or destroy them (e.g. DNA patterns). Finally, the selective activation of the causal powers of such a pattern's parts may in many cases contribute to the maintenance and preservation of the pattern itself. Taken together, he says, these points illustrate that 'higher-order patterns can have a degree of independence from their underlying physical realizations and can exert what might be called downward causal influences without requiring any objectionable

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[7] Donald T. Campbell, '"Downward Causation" in Hierarchically Organised Biological Systems', in F. J. Ayala and T. Dobzhansky, eds., *Studies in the Philosophy of Biology: Reduction and Related Problems* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 179-186.
[8] Robert Van Gulick, 'Who's in Charge Here? And Who's Doing All the Work?' in John Heil and Alfred Mele, eds., *Mental Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 233-256, quotation p. 251.

alteration of the underlying laws of physics. Higher-order properties act by the *selective activation* of physical powers and not by their *alteration*.'[9]

A likely objection to be raised to Van Gulick's account is this: The reductionist will ask *how* the larger system affects the behaviour of its constituents. To affect a constituent must be to *cause* it to do something different than it would have done otherwise. Either this is causation by the usual physical means or it is something spooky. If it is by the usual physical means, then those interactions must be governed by ordinary physical laws, and thus all causation is bottom-up after all.

The next (and I believe the most significant) development in the concept of downward causation is well represented in the work of Alicia Juarrero.[10] She describes the role of the system as a whole in determining the behaviour of its parts in terms similar to Van Gulick's account of the larger pattern or entity selectively activating the causal powers of its components, and she draws on the theory of dynamical self-organising systems to explain how. Juarrero says: 'The dynamical organization functions as an internal selection process established by the system itself, operating top-down to preserve and enhance itself. That is why autocatalytic and other self-organizing processes are primarily informational; their internal dynamics determine which molecules are "fit" to be imported into the system or survive.'[11]

She addresses the crucial question of how to understand the effect of the system on its components. Her answer is that the system *constrains* the behaviour of its component processes. The concept of a constraint in science suggests 'not an external force that pushes, but a thing's connections to something else . . . as well as to the setting in which the object is situated'.[12] More generally, then, constraints pertain to an object's connection with the environment or its embeddedness in that environment. They are relational properties rather than primary qualities in the object itself. Objects in aggregates do not have constraints; constraints only exist when an object is part of a unified system.

From information theory, Juarrero employs a distinction between *context-free* and *context-sensitive constraints*. In successive throws of a die, the numbers that have come up previously do not constrain the probabilities for the current throw; the constraints on the die's behaviour are context-

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[9] Ibid., p. 252.

[10] Alicia Juarrero, *Dynamics in Action: Intentional Behavior as a Complex System* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

[11] Ibid., p. 126.

[12] Ibid., p. 132.

free. In contrast, in a card game the constraints are context-sensitive: the chances of drawing an ace at any point are sensitive to history. She writes:

> assume there are four aces in a fifty-two card deck, which is dealt evenly around the table. Before the game starts each player has a 1/13 chance of receiving at least one ace. As the game proceeds, *once* players A, B, and C have already been dealt all four aces, the probability that player D has one automatically drops to 0. The change occurs because within the context of the game, player D's having an ace is not independent of what the other players have. Any prior probability in place before the game starts suddenly changes because, by establishing interrelationships among the players, the rules of the game impose second-order contextual constraints (and thus conditional probabilities).

> . . . [N]o external force was impressed on D to alter his situation. There was no forceful efficient cause separate and distinct from the effect. Once the individuals become card players, the conditional probabilities imposed by the rules and the course of the game itself alter the prior probability that D has an ace, not because one thing bumps into another but because each player is embedded in a web of interrelationships.[13]

Thus, a better term for this sort of interaction across levels might be 'whole-part constraint' rather than downward causation.

Application to a Simple Complex System

The goal of this paper is to argue for the applicability of the notion of downward causation (or whole-part constraint) to the problem of relating psychology to neurobiology. In the terms I have developed here, it is to understand human beings as complex dynamical systems, with their immense neural complexity, enmeshed in an immensely complex cultural environment. Such systems are beyond human capacity to describe fully. Juarrero has already applied her work on dynamical systems to the topics of meaning, intentional action, rationality, and free will, but time does not permit an overview of the rest of her work. What I shall do instead is to provide an easily grasped example of a dynamical system. Since Campbell's original paper focused on ants it is appropriate to follow in his footsteps. I will show the applicability of dynamical systems theory to the behaviour of an ant colony.

Harvester ant colonies consist of a queen surrounded by interior workers deep inside the burrow, and other worker ants that only enter chambers near the surface. The worker ants are specialised: some forage for

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[13] Ibid., p. 146.

food, others carry away trash, and still others carry dead ants away from the colony. Deborah Gordon has shown that the ants manage to locate the trash pile and the cemetery at points that maximise the distances between cemetery and trash pile, and between both of these and the colony itself.[14]

Ant colonies show other sorts of 'intelligent' behaviour. If the colony is disturbed, workers near the queen will carry her down an escape hatch. 'A harvester ant colony in the field will not only ascertain the shortest distance to a food source, it will also prioritize food sources, based on their distance and ease of access. In response to changing external conditions, worker ants switch from nest-building to foraging, to raising ant pupae.'[15] Colonies develop over time. Successful colonies last up to fifteen years, the lifespan of the queen, even though worker ants live only a year. The colonies themselves go through stages: young colonies are more fickle than older ones. Gordon says: 'If I do the same experiment week after week with older colonies, I get the same results: they respond the same way over and over. If we do the same experiment week after week with a younger colony, they'll respond one way this week, and another way next week, so the younger colonies are more sensitive to whatever's different about this week than last week.' Younger colonies are also more aggressive. 'If older colonies meet a neighbor one day, the next day they're more likely to turn and go in the other direction to avoid each other. The younger colonies are much more persistent and aggressive, even though they're smaller.'[16]

While these shifts in the colonies' 'attitudes' over time have yet to be explained, the coordination of the functions of the worker ants, such as changing from foraging to nest-building, has been. Ants secrete pheromones that serve as chemical signals to other ants. E. O. Wilson has shown that fire ants have a vocabulary of ten signals, nine based on pheromones, that code for task recognition.[17] Gradients in pheromone trails make it possible to indicate directionality. Gordon's explanation for the colony's ability to adjust task allocation according to colony size and food supply depends on the ants' ability to keep track of the frequency of encounters with other ants of various types. So, for example, '[a] foraging ant might expect to meet three other foragers per minute – if she encounters more than three, she might follow a rule that has her return to the nest' (76-77).

Knowledge of some of the ant rules gives the impression that the behaviour of the colony is entirely determined bottom-up. That is, one can imagine that each ant has built-in laws governing its behaviour, and one

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[14] Deborah Gordon, *Ants at Work: How an Insect Society is Organized* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[15] Reported in Steven Johnson, *Emergence* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 74.

[16] Quoted in Johnson, p. 81.

[17] Edward O. Wilson and Bert Holldobler, *The Ants* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

can imagine a molecular-neural level account: 'smell of fourth forager within one minute causes return to the nest'. So the typical causal agent is not 'the system as a whole' or 'the environment' but a few molecules of a pheromone embedded in the ant's receptor system. If one had all of the information about the rules, the initial placement of the ants, and the pheromone trails, one could predict or explain the behaviour of the whole colony.

Now consider an alternative, systems-theory description of the phenomena. The colony as a whole is certainly describable as a system. It is bounded but not closed; it is a self-sustaining pattern. The shift in perspective required by a systems approach is to see the colony's components as a set of interrelated functional systems – not a queen plus other *ants,* but rather an *organisation of processes* such as reproduction, foraging, nest-building. It is a system that runs on information. The colony is a self-organised system: it produces and maintains its own functional systems in that the *relations* among the ants *constrain* them to fulfil the roles of queen, forager, etc. (notice the language Juarrero uses). All have the same DNA; differentiation occurs only in the context of the colony. In addition it has a high degree of autonomy vis-a-vis the environment.

The colony displays a number of emergent, holistic properties. In addition to its relative stability there is the 'intelligence' displayed in the placement of the trash pile and cemetery, the ability to prioritise food sources. Accidents of the environment such as location of food sources affect the foraging system *as a whole*, which in turn *constrains* the behaviour of individual ants.

The crucial shift in perspective is from thinking in terms of causes (that is, nothing will happen unless something makes it happen) to thinking in terms of both bottom-up causes *and* constraints (that is, a variety of behaviours are possible and the important question is what constricts the possibilities to give the observed result). It is a switch from viewing matter as inherently passive to viewing it (at least the complex systems in question) as inherently active. In contrast to the *assumption* that each lower-level entity will do only one thing, the assumption here is that each lower-level entity has a repertoire of behaviours, one of which will be *selected* due to its *relations* to the rest of the system and to its environment. In fact, ant behaviour, when extracted from its environment (its colony), is a good visual model: drop an ant on the table and it runs helter-skelter. It can be coerced into going one way rather than another (context-free constraints), but in the colony it responds to context-sensitive constraints that entrain its behaviour to that of other ants in ways sensitive to history and higher levels of organised context. From this point of view, the

genetically imprinted rules in the individual ants' nervous systems are not (primarily) to be understood as causal laws; they are receptors of information regarding such things as the density of the forager population. The holistic property of the system, forager density, increases the probability that a given forager will encounter more than three other foragers per minute, and thus increases the probability that the ant in question will return to the nest. It is a non-forceful constraint on the ant's behaviour.

Note that the reductionist's question is: if you take all the *components* and place them in exactly the same positions in the environment and allow the system to run again, will the entire system follow exactly the same path? The reductionist assumes that it *must* do so unless there is some source of genuine indeterminacy involved at the bottom level. The systems theorist asks a different question: given that no two complex systems (e.g., two ant colonies) are ever identical, why is it the case that, starting from so wide a variety of initial conditions, one finds such similar patterns emerging? *That* the world is full of such phenomena is now a widely recognised fact, but it is counter-intuitive on a bottom-up account. I claim that the fact of higher-order patternedness in nature, patterns that are stable despite perturbations, and despite replacement of their constituents, calls for a major shift in our perceptions of (much of) the world.

Alwyn Scott, a specialist in nonlinear mathematics, states that a paradigm change (in Thomas Kuhn's sense) has occurred in science beginning in the 1970s. He describes nonlinear science as a meta-science, based on recognition of patterns in kinds of phenomena in diverse fields. This paradigm shift amounts to a new conception of the very nature of causality.[18]

Here we see again the connection between this topic and that of the shift from modern to postmodern thought. Stephen Toulmin, in his very significant book, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, wrote in 1999 that we are at the end of an era. There are ideas and beliefs of the passing worldview that have been so taken for granted as to go without saying. He calls these 'the timbers of modernity'.[19] I claim that reductionism was one of these. Already in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, at the dawn of modernity, we had the image of the hierarchy of the sciences. This image fit into a system with atomism in physics and a belief

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[18] Alwyn Scott, 'A Brief History of Nonlinear Science', *Revista del Nuovo Cimento* 27, nos. 10-11 (2004), pp. 1-115.
[19] Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, p.139.

in the determinism of all physical laws. Reductionism was (apparently) inevitable.

So I would go beyond Scott's claim that the shift from reductionism to systems thinking is a paradigm change across the sciences. I would describe it as a worldview change as well.

Conclusion

The topic of nonreductive physicalism is an important one for those engaged in contemporary theological research. In the modern liberal Protestant tradition it has been common to argue that science is intrinsically irrelevant to religion and theology, because their aims are so different. However, in the case of theories of human nature this division is clearly untenable. For centuries Christian theology (and often Jewish and Muslim thought as well) has taught (or presupposed) a dualist account of the human being, largely under the influence of Greek philosophy. Informal surveys show that the majority of lay believers in the West hold either a dualist or trichotomist (body, soul, and spirit) account of human nature.

Meanwhile, science has increasingly made dualism and trichotomism untenable. The development of modern physics created the problem of mind-body interaction, and most philosophers now judge this problem to be insoluble. Evolutionary biology established the continuity of humans with other animals. If animals have no immaterial minds (as most modern thinkers have assumed) then it is difficult to see why one should think that humans do. Finally, the cognitive neurosciences are increasingly explaining all of the capacities once attributed to the mind or soul in terms of very specific brain regions and systems.

Christian and Jewish biblical scholars and historians have long argued that dualism was not a part of early Jewish or Christian teaching. The biblical account portrays humans as unitary beings, although manifesting a variety of dimensions or aspects – physicality, emotion, rationality, spirituality – all understood in relational terms. So one important role for the discussion of nonreductive physicalism is to bring to popular awareness the large-scale rejection of dualism among Western Christian scholars.

And, as I have argued here, it is crucial to argue against reductionism, since a reductive physicalism, denying the genuineness of all higher human capacities, would be entirely unsatisfactory from a religious point of view.

However, while the arguments over reductionism in the human sphere are of primary interest to theologians, I am suggesting that there is a

whole new worldview in the process of being developed, and one of its 'timbers', in Toulmin's sense, is going to be an anti-reductionist, systems account of reality in general. We must be prepared to enter into this new way of thinking and help all of our students to understand it.

Dr Nancey Murphy is Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary and a Research Professor at IBTS.

New Inspirations and Religious Education in Poland: The Process Perspective[1]

Polish society is quite unusual as far as cultural identity is concerned. What I mean is, first of all, the monolithic religious context compared to other European societies. Secondly, in the last several years a big economic emigration was noticed, especially to Great Britain and Ireland which forced many Poles to interact with other cultures and religions. My assumption is that symbols and structures shaped by religious beliefs, to a great extent, influence the structure of traditional societies. Poland still belongs to this group in spite of rapid changes that occurred after the political shift in 1989 and especially after joining the European Union.

The research, the results of which are presented in this paper, is based on the phenomenographic approach[2] and was accomplished in June and July 2007 among teachers of religion in Gdansk secondary schools (where more than 90% of students attend lessons in religion provided by churches within the grounds of the public schools). I was interested in their readiness and ability to shift from one theological state to another – so the research is about the dynamics in the sphere of religious conceptualisation and its connection to the present sociopolitical situation in Poland. It also deals with the relationship between teaching and learning in the processes of religious socialisation.

Among the respondents there were twenty teachers of the Roman Catholic religion and fifteen teachers of other religions (including Christian denominations: Polish National Catholic, Greek Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Adventist churches, as well as other religions: Islam, Buddhism and Judaism), all teaching in gymnasiums (Polish middle schools with students aged 13-16). Interviews were held in schools in which religion is taught or in educational facilities run by parishes. Roman Catholic respondents were selected randomly while the group of teachers of other religions – because of their minority status – practically included the whole population. This paper reflects on one out of twelve groups of questions that were asked in the research. In the phenomenographic procedure, the following categories of meanings assigned by teachers to the examined phenomena were isolated:

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[2] See Ference Marton, *Phenomenography*, in Torsten Husén and T. Neville Postlethwaite (eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Education* (London: Pergamon Press, 1994); John A. Bowden, *Reflections on the Phenomenographic Research Process*, in John A. Bowden and Pam Green (Eds), *Doing Developmental Phenomenography* (Victoria: RMIT University Press, 2005).

What inspires you to think about God? Where do you look for inspiration of this kind?

- Participation in the liturgical life of the Church.
- Personal prayer and reading of Scripture.
- The awareness of what God has done.
- The internet and reading books.
- Life experiences, difficult situations.
- Contact with other religions and cultures.
- Other people, including students, and their experiences.
- Contact with nature.

How do new inspirations change your understanding of God?

- God remains the same but becomes closer.
- The image of oneself and the surrounding reality is changed.
- The image of God is changed.
- New inspirations reinforce the desire for seeking God even more.
- God is a mystery, he is unknowable.

How do you evaluate changes in your perception of God?

- Change is a desired development.
- Changes are a result of a natural psychophysical development of a human being until the 'mature' image of God is established.
- Changes are dangerous.

It may be stated in general terms that the interviewed teachers of religion working with 13-16 year-olds in Gdańsk are aware of the changes taking place in the world. A number of them, however, see those changes as a threat to the religious identity conceived of in static terms because they assume it to be based on some established standards derived from the transcendent. Consequently, they are not open to inter-religious dialogue which could introduce new elements into the discursive structure, dynamising the process of creating new meanings and developing the theological identity of the subject. Some respondents openly declare that in their case this process has been finished, whereas others are only open to changes within the paradigms operating in their own traditions. Only a small number of the interviewed teachers look for new inspirations to think about God, and only single individuals within that number, in their search, turn to other religions. This is true of both the Roman Catholic confession, dominant in Poland, as well as of the minority confessions and religions.

The aim of the questions was to identify the readiness for theological change and for a shift from a teaching to a learning position. The research was focused on change as the basic concept, especially in relation to teachers and learners, and its aim was to grasp the quality of the influence

on society this relationship implies (hierarchical or relational). This also includes the questions: what is to be thought, what is to be learned, and why. The theoretical framework for the analyses is the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and its pedagogical implications (John B. Cobb, Mary Elisabeth Mullino Moore).

Major elements of Whitehead's metaphysics are: the oneness of reality as well as its dynamism and variability, and the integration of apparent antagonisms and contradictions into a single whole. The chief tenets of process theology – pragmatism, panexperimentalism, the relationality of God and other beings, and their correspondence to the nature of the world, the atomistic concept of time – are the background of the specific understanding of religious doctrine, the concept of God and man, and the nature of the world, which have a great impact on the quality of religious education in the context of today's world. Actually, we live in a world where we have to reformulate theological instruction due to the closeness of other religions and cultures.[3]

Doctrinal formulations are not perceived here as an absolute determinant of faith but rather as a socially construed result of its connection with a given culture. Process theologians see the justification of this conviction not only in philosophical analyses but also in the biblical text, particularly in the Old Testament differentiation between priests (preserving the social and theological *status quo*) and prophets (who demanded a change). Therefore, the role of a theologian is about a responsible (i.e. non-revolutionary) transformation of reality through a reinterpretation of the functioning religious symbols in the context of the changing culture. This is how the activity of Moses and Jesus is viewed; this is also the task of their followers because 'where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint' (Proverbs 29:18, NRSV). God is seen as the source of love and the exemplification of metaphysical principles; in Him the a-temporal eternals become facts, which means that the reality is not created by Him *ex nihilo* but rather conditioned by Him (*creatio ex Deo*). Cobb, after Whitehead, depicts God as a relational being constantly participating in complementation processes: His creative activity is an example to all other beings. Man's humanity, therefore, should not be considered as a *given* but as a *task* because freedom is linked to the responsibility for co-creating history through active multiplication of an individual experience. Significantly, process theologians stress the necessity of the dialogue between religion and science, hence their approval of the evolutionary model of the origins of the world.

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[3] David R. Griffin, *Process Theology and the Christian Good News. A Response to Classical Free Will Theism*, in John B. Cobb, Clark H. Pinnock (eds.), *Searching for an Adequate God. A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2000), p. 3.

The next topic under discussion is the pan-en-theistic view of reality, resulting in the concern about nature and, in theology, a shift of the emphasis from theo- and anthropocentrism toward the sacredness of life and ecological awareness. This leads to certain repercussions in John B. Cobb's ethical thought: in the idea of ecojustice and the paradigm of adventure and joy of life as a starting point in the quest for specific ethical assertions. In the processual perspective, however, these assertions are always local and temporal because of the freedom and activity of the relationally situated ethical subjects. In this system, God is no longer an omnipotent decision maker responsible for the condition of the world but rather a co-creator of history who offers his help, which in the opinion of process theologians is the only solution to the theodicy problem.[4] Thus, the sense of life lies in the very existence on this earth and not in the anticipation of the ephemeral heavenly reality; consequently, the paradigm of certainty of salvation, typical of evangelical Christianity, is replaced by the paradigm of the hope of salvation, which in Cobb's opinion stimulates Christians to get actively and creatively involved in the socio-cultural life of the contemporary world. The theological buttressing of such an attitude is the person of Jesus Christ as described in the creed of the Chalcedonian Council: the true God and concurrently true man, with the two natures not confused but united in one person and one hypostasis. This ideal harmony of the reality in Jesus is a complete exemplification of process principles.

Process theology, conceiving of God and the world in a permanent organic relationship, implies an active participation of believers in the social life. This issue is always discussed against the background of the changes in contemporary culture largely affecting the internal structure of the Church as well as its message and social status. In particular, this refers to the complementariness as the gnoseological principle as well as catholicity understood as a partnership of the dialoguing traditions. The calling of the Church is to initiate changes in the world; these, for the most part, are generated in the dialogue with other religions and philosophical systems. In this respect theology fulfils a role similar to that of art: constantly looking for new means of expression, it liberates and transforms human reality. The calling of a Christian, then, is not religious activity; Christ must not be a character absolutising the culture but instead a power that transforms the actual world with the whole array of its problems. Among the most urgent ones are those related to the progressive degradation of the natural environment and the atomisation of social life. Cobb attempts to present a solution through his idea of Christian communitarianism in which health, work, education, safety, and other earthly needs are integral parts of the salvation project carried out by

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[4] Ibid., p. 52.

religions. In the light of this, the Church should be *the vanguard of the new age*, also in the field of economy. Cobb criticises what he views as the neocolonial politics of the West (particularly the United States) toward the rest of the world. Social relationships, so far regulated by the interests of a small group of decision makers, should be based on neighbour solidarity whose model may be found in the Old Testament community of Israel.[5]

The process view of education is connected with the chief principles of American pragmatism which, in my opinion, results in the idea of the interpenetration of religious traditions and theological concepts, regarded by Cobb as a necessary catalyst of development, both in the dimension of a single human being and the whole of society. The concepts of reality as a dynamic collection of interactions occurring between the participants, the open (non-determined) world, the relational character of the awareness (soul) and the being (body), the complementariness of apparently mutually exclusive notions and phenomena, and viewing truth in terms of everyday life, seem common to both pragmatism and post-Whiteheadian processualism. From this perspective education is based on intertwining of different perspectives and of a broad spectrum of worldviews. In addition, the legitimacy of the Enlightenment purpose of social progress is questioned. Cobb demonstrates that the replacement of process with progress brings to the contemporary world a growing chaotic fragmentation of social life and alienates man from nature which has its own pace of development. A solution to this problem is seen in the remarriage of science and religion, i.e. the harmony of rational and irrational factors, as postulated by processists. This theory, enabling a simultaneous perception of reality in terms of the general (God) and the specific (fact), should be reflected both in education concepts and school curricula; here, the school is considered as a natural point of encounter (of students, teachers, books, histories, present and potential problems, spaces, etc.) while the role of the teacher is not to pass on 'ready' knowledge but to creatively coordinate the mutual influences occurring among the participants of such encounters.

As mentioned earlier, process philosophy, as well as related theological and pedagogical reflection, is strongly connected to American pragmatism, represented by Charles S. Peirce, William James, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley and – above all – John Dewey. According to these philosophers, knowledge should always be oriented towards the real world characterised by diversity and changeability (using Dewey's terms, reality is subject to continual 'reorganisation' and is never 'finished' in its development). Abstract and holistic models are useless

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[5] John B. Cobb, *Can Comparative Religious Ethics Help?* in Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *Transforming Christianity and the World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 164.

fancy; what matters is everyday life and solutions to real problems (the ethical and political dimensions of philosophy). It is also noteworthy that pragmaticians refer to the naturalistic assumption that a human being is a part of the broader world of nature but – contrary to Spencerian evolutionism – they strongly oppose social determinism. Culture does not have a spiritual or metaphysical source but is a form of an active and responsible adjustment to actual conditions of life. Consequently, it is not established ontically nor grounded in a transcendental pattern, which in the pedagogical context considered here means that the subject is being continually constructed. Reality is a dynamic collection of interactions between its participants; it is open (processual) by character and every aspect of the world consists of continual becoming. A human being is a unique participant of these processes: on the one hand, conditioned naturally and culturally, and on the other hand, free to change the encountered reality through his or her active involvement.[6] Pragmaticians criticised dualism of reality and abandoned the rigid differentiations between the soul and body, consciousness and being, thinking and acting, organism and environment, individual and society. Rather, people are in the constant process of mutual adjustment to one another and to the environment. The essence of socialisation is a harmony of continuation and creativity; any innovations cannot be hostile towards tradition.

The pragmatists view truth in a distinctive way: it always refers to the practice of everyday life (a statement is true if it works) and, as such, is not a closed or static notion. Truth is not to be discovered but to be experienced; the experiencing subject should not be raised above the experienced object but should be immersed in it (thus the borderline between the subject and object of experience is blurred). Consequently, knowledge constantly escapes possession and rather than being conceived of statically as a commodity it must be approached dynamically as a process dependent on the entire context of time, place, etc. This principle refers to both gnoseology and axiology: values are constructed through a person's concrete involvement, which means that some disappear and others emerge. Social values are established democratically; that is why education should above all develop human activity and responsibility. Educational processes are not limited to a specific area or time and all established educational institutions must as much as possible reflect the currently experienced world.[7] Because of the changeability and diversity of reality, learning is based on the principle of novelty viewed as a virtue and,

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[6] See William James, *Pragmatism. A new name for some old ways of thinking* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978).

[7] See John Dewey, *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929).

consequently, on pluralism which leads to that novelty. A school, therefore, is a place in which knowledge is not merely transmitted but created through the exchange of experiences of the participants (teachers, students, authors of course books, etc.). Being in a rut kills the spirit of development while an educational success consists of awakening the students' courage to experiment with and change the reality they experience.

Despite his emphasis on diversity in education, Dewey carefully avoided the two extremes of individualism and collectivism. An individual is always a part of a larger social organism; that is why it is important to be aware of common pursuits and achieve a relative uniformity in perceiving the world.[8] Democracy is therefore primarily a form of exchange of experiences and it is in this sense that it is vitally important for the development of both individuals and entire societies. The life of an individual must not be considered apart from the life of the social organism but, at the same time, it is individuals that affect the character of society. This mutual and constant influence is a result of communicative processes, that is, interactions between all participants of a community. This democratic ideal of education is founded on the conviction that the occurrence of desirable changes is directly proportional to the intensity of exchange of experiences between the participants of social life. The evolution of thought is therefore founded on the freedom of individuals and social groups as well as on shared activity. Cooperation and dialogical coexistence of participants of the social life is the absolute foundation for the development of culture and social organisation.

Likewise, Charles H. Cooley – because of the assumption concerning the organicity of social life – maintained that notions and phenomena that appear to be mutually exclusive (e.g. freedom and necessity, the individual and the group, the spirit and the matter, science and art) must not be separated as antinomies but viewed in a complementary way as collective and distributive aspects of one reality.[9] That is why we should oppose any particularism and artificial isolation of specific aspects (e.g. biological, economic, psychological, etc.) as if they functioned independently of one another. For everything is a part of a single process of life in its entirety. From this perspective, both isolated collectivism and individualism must be viewed as destructive extremes; through communication processes an individual exists within a group and a group exists in an individual (mutual interpenetration[10]). However, this does not mean that opposites blur in some homogeneous structure. The author of the theory of symbolic

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[8] John Dewey, *Logic. The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1938), pp. 66-67.
[9] Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and Social Order* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 36-37.
[10] See Talcott Parsons, *Stability and Social Change* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 5-6.

interactionism, George Herbert Mead, also overcomes dualism (of the body and soul, instincts and consciousness, etc.) through the category of act and social act, in which inner experience is always a part of a broader whole.[11] Within that whole, conscious processes of action and reaction build up human personality while life becomes meaningful through act (social interaction). According to Mead, the self has social origins: an individual may only experience himself or herself through the mediation of the other.

The basic tenets of pragmatism were recognised and developed by Richard Rorty, who related the idea of democracy not so much to emancipation but to tolerance and openness to cultural difference. However, he did not insist that a juxtaposition of differences must always result in a synthesis; at the same time, this does not mean that some borders are not to be crossed.[12] The tension between objectivism and subjectivism in Rorty's thought is manifested in the idea of solidarity and voluntary agreement, based on the fundamental principle of a person's loyalty towards other people. This is some sort of a third way (between dogmatic conservatism and heartless liberalism) which allows for a critical attitude towards the encountered values only from the inside of a social system, i.e. when the values established democratically have been sufficiently internalised. In other words, an individual is only capable of a responsible (i.e. non-revolutionary) implementation of innovations if he or she is bound to the local community through socialisation processes resulting in a similarity and partnership of values and experiences. At the same time, Rorty, though recognising the relative and casual nature of these similarities, argues not only for a local but also global responsibility; otherwise, misunderstood freedom will lead to acculturation, uprooting, alienation, and ultimately to social disintegration. Rorty's neopragmatism does not permit challenging the social consensus at the lower levels of education though it protects the freedom of the university; the freedom of democracy is therefore an educational goal.[13]

Democratic coexistence of cultures and ideas must then be based on the ethics of consultation and compromise, i.e. competing statements should be in the state of balance rather than fight. We should prevent the social domination of a single option creating a false sense of objectivity. Free and open encounters of various philosophical, theological and ethical ideas should lead to repeated choices of best solutions for the respective social groups. This means that no truth should aspire to being established as

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[11] See: George Herbert Mead, *Mind, self and society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934).

[12] Richard Rorty, *Cosmopolitanism Without Emancipation. A Response to Lyotard*, [in:] Scott Lash, Jonathan Friedman (ed.), *Modernity and Identity* (Oxford, UK, Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 61.

[13] See: Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

absolute; rather, what we deal with are continual transformations of particular truths resulting from their interaction. A relative sense of stability comes only from accumulated social and individual experience. In order to overcome this awareness, Rorty suggests an ironic attitude which helps us retain a necessary distance when faced with no ultimate answers to human questions. A free and distanced person may belong to various social groups, experiment with different lifestyles, and experience a number of value systems. Only then can one develop by making conscious choices, though at the cost of being aware of one's casualness. It may be expected that mature societies in the future will derive their sense only from this world and the reality will no longer have to be rooted in transcendence of any kind. This is exemplified even today by citizens of Western democracies. This does not mean, however, rejecting the irrational aspect altogether but perceiving it in esthetic terms as complementary to the rational aspect (the union of art and science), thanks to which the postulated utopia will not slip into nihilism.

Even though neopragmaticians (not only Rorty but also Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson and John B. Cobb) are critical of metaphysical realism (in Cobb's case, of theological dogmatism), they do not advocate relativism. On the contrary, they stress the necessity to retain discursive analyses of great contemporary problems. Putnam calls Rotry a cultural relativist, accusing him of identifying truth with norms of a specific cultural community, which means that all statements have particular meanings only to their authors. Thus it becomes impossible to construct some holistic – though not absolute – system; entities are separated by impenetrable barriers (no continuity and relationship); repetition (e.g. quoting) is impossible because the respective statements only work in their original contexts. As a result, social isolationism grows deeper and any kind of discourse becomes immaterial as knowledge is either totally private or confined to the already existing cultural or religious circles (because of this, Putnam also criticises Michel Foucault); propositions cannot be compared because relativism assumes no cultural commensurability which would make it possible.[14]

Cultural relativism views particular cultures as closed monads; by accepting symbolic untranslatability it sanctions social separationism. Consequently, under some conditions it is potentially dangerous because it builds up a tension between the particular monads that cannot be reduced. Ethnocentrism viewed in this way is opposed by both Putnam and Rorty, as well as Cobb. Unlike Putnam, Rorty is looking for opportunities to build

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[14] H. Putnam, *Realism and Reason. Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge- New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 195.

bridges between the isolated islands-monads, trusting that there is a way out of the extremes of individualism and collectivism. He believes there must be some third way between absolutism and cultural imperialism on the one hand and relativism on the other hand. In the opinion of both Cobb and Putnam, it is based on the capacity of human reason to operate in several systems of notions and on the existence of some transcendent framework of reference, enabling successful exchange of ideas and experiences between cultures. This is provided by rationality immersed in the experience of life. Rationality, which goes beyond accepting the function of a mere observer, is both entitled and compelled to declare a certain state of affairs. Life itself establishes canons of truth and falsehood, being the most important human commodity and creating an area of exchange between individuals, thus enabling the sustained existence and development of a society. As a result of this approach, Cobb rejects the extremes of both religious pluralism (cultural relativism) and exclusivism (the fiction of the so-called 'divine point of view'). Rationality conceived of in this way is not the capacity to discover truths or achieve common consensus (which Hans Küng seems to suggest in his pursuit of global ethics) but the ability to act in order to maximise the likelihood of causing the desired results within the community (which includes their relational and contextual character). Cobb's pedagogy of ecumenism, then, is based on a community of experience which *de facto* enables further reconstruction of the socio-cultural matter. In this sense, neither scientific nor theological rationality exists beyond the context of concrete experience; truth about God (transcendence) in separation from life is an illusion.[15]

A human being, along with the culture he or she creates, is neither separated from nature nor placed above it as God's representative who subdues the earth. Rather, he or she is settled in nature and connected with

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[15] Obviously, the processual thought discussed here is not only related to neopragmatic philosophy; it is also referred to by e.g. Gilles Deleuze's poststructural philosophy of difference (particularly addressing *Process and Reality*), demonstrating the coexistence of casualness and chaos with order and identity. The process of perpetual differentiation of beings (termed by Alfred N. Whitehead the very principle of process) is the basis of their identity; what we have here is a phenomenon of coherence amidst disintegration, the unity of reality and its concurrent diversity, though Deleuze is more radical than Whitehead and Cobb in asserting the irrationality and indeterminism of the chaotically differentiating world. At any rate, they share the rejection of substantialism as the starting point for the reflection on identity and the assumption that logos governs the world – instead, Deleuze points to chance and process philosophers to the relation between the world and God, which after all is a kind of unpredictable game (at best, we can speak of probability). Reality, therefore, is always transitional (processual), which means that there is no timeless and absolute truth. Even scientific truth – much like being – is still emerging, so it has no right to monopolise the description of reality. Deleuze stresses the creative character of differentiating but his idea goes beyond the holistically balanced and organic system God-world-creativity, lacing an integrating synthesis or ordering factor. See: Krzysztof Kościuszko, *Chaos i wiedza. Przyrodoznawczo-epistemologiczny aspekt filozofii różnicy Deleuze'a* (Olsztyn: Wydaw. Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, 2000), p. 118; G. Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 159-160.

it; nature and culture are unified.[16] Because of this, the sense and fulfilment of human life is not the exclusive result of analyses of the mind (soul) or experiences of the material body – as independently operating spheres of experience – but comes from dialogically creating new possibilities, which in process theology is compared to the dance of life; the meaningfulness of reality consists of its participants' creative acts. In the process of the constant development of an organism the key element is not the desire of the individuals to survive (evolution) but the interactions between them; the dance of life does not incorporate steps planned ahead but develops unpredictably, fancifully, surprisingly, and yet surely! Creative relationships build up the meaning and sense of existence of beings and conversely: singleness, isolationism and solitude lead to nihilism. Dance, typical of all pairs and rooted in nature, in this light becomes the hermeneutic key that unlocks the meaningfulness of life at large. All knowledge is transitory; one should rather speak of attempts to 'capture' reality and multiple perceptions thereof. Changes do not occur according to a simple principle of causality: some may be predicted, others not. Nor are they designed and controlled from the outside; rather, the world is in a constant process of self-creation.

Following these presuppositions and conclusion, the idea of the development of religion is viewed here as a result of the dialogue occurring between representatives of particular traditions and theological trends. This idea, far from being confined to the changing doctrines, is vital for the development of man in the whole cycle of life and to the harmonious coexistence of various human communities in the contemporary world. Even a general survey of the basic formulations of the twentieth century theology of religions (the simultaneous complementariness and completeness of the economy of salvation of the individual persons of the Holy Trinity, the progressive character of God's Epiphany) provides a background against which possible examples of interpenetration of religious ideas could be presented. Of significance is Cobb's belief in the existence of more than one irreducible sphere: apart from God, he isolates the category of *Creativeness* as equivalent to notions like *Sunyata* or *Dharmakaya* but different from specific exemplifications of the Supreme Being, such as e.g. *Ishvara*, *Jahveh* or *Christ*. This distinction is to enable a dialogical development of particular theologies while at the same time preventing them from ideological homogenisation.[17]

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[16] John B. Cobb, *Thinking with Whitehead about Nature*, [in:] J. Polanowski, D. Sherburne (ed.), *Whitehead's Philosophy. Points of Connection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 175-196.

[17] John B. Cobb, *Concluding Reflections*, in Paul F. Knitter (ed.), *Transforming Christianity and the World*, p. 184-185.

The fact that theology is construed socially leads one to consider not the dogmatic essence of Christianity but rather the Christian structure of existence, rooted in the awareness of God's presence in the world and realised in the human responsibility for experienced reality. The same is true of other religions. For example some Jewish thinkers combine the concept of God's processuality with His immanent presence in the constantly created world and with the problem of theodicy. This leads to a reinterpretation of the Old Testament idea of a covenant extended to the whole world according to the promise given to Noah.

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How Indigenous was the Baptist Movement in the Russian Empire?

In reviewing a religious movement, the question often arises, how indigenous is it? Such a question often produces intense debate. Some researchers stress the contribution of the foreign missionary as against others who stress the role of native personnel, divorcing a movement from all western or imperialistic associations. In a recent issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* Jeffrey Cox, who has written on British missionary history, has come to the conclusion: 'Yet Third World Christian churches are neither independent of Western influences nor purely indigenous; in historical terms, they are hybrid, the results of a dialectical relationship between missionaries and non-Western Christians.'[1]

What about Baptists in Russia? From the start, Baptists have been attacked for being a foreign import, incompatible with the culture of the country and a threat to society. N.I. Petrov, in his article, 'Novyya svedeniya o shtundisme', wrote, '…in the beginning of the 70s missionaries of Baptism were deliberately sent out from Hamburg to the German Kherson colonies; they find there fortuitously Ukrainian workers – people for a long time already isolated from the family and society with the church [--] without difficulty they master them and turn them into an instrument of spreading their heresy among the people, never having had knowledge of the heresy'.[2]

One of the chief proponents of rejecting the indigenous character of the evangelical movement or stundism in Russia is Alexiĭ Dorodnitsyn, a Russian Orthodox anti-sectarian missionary, later a bishop and rector of Kazan Religious Academy, a collector of official documents, and a writer of a number of works on stundism and Baptists. His work in 1903, *Yuzhno-*Russkiĭ *Neobaptism', izvestnyĭ pod' imenem' shtundy* (or *South-Russian Neobaptism, Known by the Name Stunda*), first of all identifies the Baptist movement with continental Anabaptism, including its revolutionary manifestation in Münster, Germany, an old falsehood. He rejects the thesis that Ukrainian stundism arose from the German colonies in Russia but insists it is a product of German Baptist missionaries from abroad. He wrote at a time of intense Germanophobia, a fear of Germans and Germany, a fear also directed against the German colonists in Russia. In such a climate, Orthodox writers, upholding Russian autocracy and

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[1] Jeffrey Cox, 'What I Have Learned About Missions from Writing *The British Missionary Enterprise Since 1700'*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research,* XXXII/2 (April, 2008), pp. 86-87.
[2] *Trudy Kievskoï Dukhovnoï Akademii*, 1887, no. 3, p. 383.

Orthodoxy as the only legitimate religion for native Russians/Ukrainians, stressed the German ties with stundism or the Baptists, thereby discrediting both of them in the eyes of the populace. But can such a position be sustained?

1.   Dispersion of Religious Bodies

Before one considers these contentions, one should first of all consider some other factors.

First, from its beginning among Aramaic-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, Christianity has remarkably flowed from one foreign culture to another. It spread to Hellenistic Jews and then to Greek-speaking Gentiles. In the West it reached Latin-speaking peoples and later to Germanic, Celtic, and English peoples. In the East it spread to Armenians and Copts in Egypt and became the state church of Byzantium or the Eastern Roman Empire and later entered Russia. Russian Orthodoxy itself is a foreign implantation along with other Christian groups that have entered the Russian state.

Secondly, the Baptist movement itself has had a varied history. One might start four hundred years ago with John Smyth, an Englishman living in the Netherlands, but his movement of General Baptists soon transported itself to England. Another segment of the Baptist denomination, Particular Baptists, began in England but soon spread to Wales and Ireland. Both movements reached America. Finally, in the early nineteenth century Baptists arrived on the European continent. Johann Oncken, the father of the continental European Baptist movement, although German-born, in his younger years lived in the British Isles where he learned English. In Hamburg, Germany, he joined an English Reformed Church. In his missionary work, the word soon circulated about a 'new English faith'.[3]

Mikhail Timoshenko, a Russian Baptist leader, in his article in 1911, 'Baptisty i ikh' protivniki' (Baptists and Their Adversaries), declared, 'The Baptist movement is not foreign but clearly international. For as all people on the earth need bread, water and air, so also all need spiritual nourishment.'[4] Baptists are not a cult with their own special revelation. It is a movement that tries to approximate the faith and life of the apostolic church and to proclaim to all in any nation the gospel of Jesus Christ. But all religious movements come in a cultural garb. And so the question still remains – how indigenous to Russia was the Baptist movement?

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[3] Hans Luckey, 'Johann Gerhard Oncken und die Anfänge des deutschen Baptismus' (Kassel: J.G. Oncken, 1934), pp. 70-71.
[4] *Baptist*, 1911, no. 9, p. 69.

2.   Stundism

Years before Baptists appeared in the Russian Empire, other Protestants such as Lutherans and Reformed had already arrived some centuries before, settling not only in towns but especially as German colonists in southern Russia. Stundism, a pietistic movement stressing personal religious experience and piety, took root among the German colonists. Stundism came from the German word, 'stunde', meaning hour. Stundists, led by laity, gathered for an hour or more for prayer, Bible reading, and song. German stundism was primarily a movement within the established Lutheran and Reformed churches. Their adherents, by and large, were not separatists but remained in their own parish churches, attending the services and observing the sacraments, including infant baptism.

German stundism influenced neighbouring Ukrainian villages. The Reformed parish of Rohrbach, northeast of Odessa, with its pastor, Karl Bonekemper, was an important stundist centre, even attracting neighbouring Orthodox peasants to stundist meetings. One such peasant was Mikhail T. Ratushnyï (1830-c.1915), who from stundist influence and reading the Scripture for himself became, at the beginning of the 1860s, an evangelical believer. As a stundist leader, he will lead his followers to break with the Orthodox Church and in time accept Baptist principles. Because of the influence of Ephraim Pritzkau and his son, Johann, the German colony of Alt-Danzig, a number of kilometers northeast of Odessa, became another important stundist centre. Ivan G. Ryaboshapka (1831-1900), who lived nearby, also from German stundist influence and reading the Scripture, became a believer and a stundist leader.[5]

Besides the influence of German stundism, indigenous elements within Ukrainian society also pushed the first Ukrainian believers towards stundism. First, of great importance was the circulation of the Scripture. For some years the British and Foreign Bible Society, although under restriction, circulated various versions of the Bible, including Russian. In 1861 the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church produced its own Russian version of the four Gospels and in the following year the complete New Testament. The Old Testament will come later.[6]

Another factor was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. Even though emancipation did not meet the full expectations of the peasant masses, it nevertheless was a significant turning point in Russian society. Peasants were no longer tied to the land and free to move. With the

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[5] *Quarterly Review*, July 1874, pp. 5-6.
[6] William Canton, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: John Murray, 1904-1910), III, pp. 340-64.

economic emancipation came also an emancipation of the mind; new ideas were possible, and literacy became a more attainable goal.

A third factor was the vulnerable position of the Orthodox Church, the established church for the native Slavic peoples of the nation. The church was still powerful, protected by laws that forbade heresy and the proselytism of its adherents. On the other hand, it was failing to meet many of the religious needs of the population. Although able to administer the rites of the church, priests were often poorly trained, possessing little biblical knowledge, and frequently lived on no higher moral level than their own parishioners with their addiction to drink and other vices. Priests conducted the liturgy in Old Church Slavonic, a language the masses did not understand, and their lack of preaching left the people with little or no biblical understanding of the Christian faith. Piety was centred on the rites of the church that included the sacraments, worship before icons, relics, and special fasts and holy days.

German stundism was an important element in the rise of Ukrainian stundism, but Ukrainian stundism followed its own path of development. Ukrainian stundists did not produce any purely Reformed or Lutheran congregations, not accepting their confessions of faith, church government, or sacraments. From the beginning Ukrainian stundism was congregational and anti-sacramental, rejecting both the sacramentalism of Orthodoxy and the sacramentalism of the established Protestant churches. Unlike most German stundists, it was also separatist. It rejected the counsel of Karl Bonekemper not to leave the Orthodox Church. Instead it became a dissenting movement.

In January, 1905, *Missionerskoe obozrenie*, the Orthodox anti-sectarian periodical, published a perceptive article by Sergeï Troitskiï entitled, 'V' kakom' otnoshenii uchenie russkago shtundizma nakhoditsya k' nemetskomu protestantizmu' (What Is the Relationship of the Teaching of Russian Stundism to German Protestantism). Because of its rapid spread among the indigenous population, the author argued that it thus could not have been simply a foreign import; if it were, it would fade and disappear. He pointed out that German stundism helped to create among the Orthodox a critical attitude toward the Orthodox faith but that few Ukrainians became pure Lutherans or pure Reformed. On the other hand, he stated that Russian stundism borrowed more from various Protestant sects, including Baptists. He felt that Russian stundism took the greater part of its Protestant teaching in fragments, not taking Protestantism in its pure original form. Russian stundism ultimately developed its own form, adopting more from Protestantism on its negative side than on its positive side.[7]

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[7] *Missionerskoe obozrenie*, January 1905, pp. 55-57.

3.   German Baptist Influence

Although the Orthodox author Troitskiï may have overstated the case for Ukrainian stundism developing on its own, though borrowing from a number of sources, he nevertheless was on the right track in recognising sectarian influence. It then brings one to the question of the role of the German Baptists. German Baptists, if the opportunity presented itself, would have been more than happy to evangelise in the Russian Empire. Oncken in Hamburg corresponded with Mennonite and German Baptist leaders in Russia and even visited the country twice.

But German Baptists were largely prevented in evangelising the native population because of the language barrier and also the strict penalties for proselytising among the Orthodox. German Baptists had a difficult time in sending missionaries even among the German settlers. As Arseniï Rozhdestvenskiï, the Orthodox writer on Russian stundism, pointed out, German Baptist missionaries could not stay for any length of time. He pointedly wrote, 'they were sent packing (*vyprovazhivali*) abroad, that is, sent out without ceremony.[8] He was right. In my research I have found only one German subject who stayed for any extended time, August Liebig. In his career in Russia his work was almost entirely among Germans, and even he was exiled twice from the country.

Aside from Liebig, Germans who were born in the Russian Empire did most of the Baptist mission work among the German population in the country. The earliest of these men was Gottfried Alf (1831-1898), my great-great grand uncle, the first ordained Baptist minister in the Russian Empire.[9] Alf was born in Russian Poland and preached in both German and Polish. While a teacher and still a Lutheran, he had a religious experience that led him to preach the gospel. Opposition from the Lutheran authorities forced him out of his church. Although not knowing Baptists, he soon heard of them and decided to become a Baptist since they appeared to be in accord with Scripture. His immersion as a believer in 1858 began the Baptist movement in Poland, a movement that also spread into Volhynia in Ukraine. Although Alf went to Hamburg and received support from abroad, the Alf movement was indigenous, developing its own workers and churches. Such German-Russians as Karl Ondra, A.R. Schiewe, and Johann Prizkau also led the German Baptist work in Russia.

German Baptists developed special ties with Mennonite Brethren, a pietistic revival movement that broke from other Mennonites in Ukraine. Without knowing Baptists but influenced by a Baptist tract, Mennonite

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[8] Arseniï Rozhdestvenskiï, *Yuzhnorusskiï shtundizm* (St. Petersburg, 1889), p. 101.
[9] For the career of Gottfried Alf, see Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *Gottfried F. Alf: Pioneer of the Baptist Movement in Poland* (Brentwood, Tennessee: Baptist History and Heritage Society, 2003).

Brethren began to immerse believers in 1860. Oncken corresponded with Abraham Unger, a future Mennonite Brethren leader, possibly as early as 1859 and will send August Liebig in 1866 to visit Unger and other Mennonites. Both Johann Pritzkau of Alt-Danzig, who was immersed as early as 1864 by Mennonite Brethren, and Johann Wieler, a Mennonite Brethren, will both meet with Oncken in Hamburg at the end of the 1860s. In 1869 Oncken himself will travel to Russia and visit Mennonite Brethren, constitute the German Baptist church in Alt-Danzig, and even consult with Ukrainian believers.

Baptist work in the Caucasus began with the migration in 1861 of Martin K. Kalweit (1833-1918) with his wife and two sisters to the area of Tiflis, today Tbilisi, in the country of Georgia. Kalweit was a German of Lithuanian extraction but born a Russian subject living in Kovno Province near the Russian-German border. After his migration, Kalweit at first felt isolated and almost abandoned, even fearing the Russian people. He nevertheless began to hold worship services, using both German and Russian. On August 20, 1867 (o.s.), Kalweit baptised Nikita I. Voronin (1840-1905), the first Russian Baptist convert, a Molokan who was searching the Scripture and sought baptism. Molokans were a native Russian sect that rejected all sacraments, including also those of the Orthodox Church.

Voronin preached among his fellow Molokans, gathering a group that numbered seven or eight in 1870. In the 1870s Kalweit's group will break up and join the Voronin body. This work produced outstanding leaders, including Vasiliĭ Pavlov and Vasiliĭ V. Ivanov, as well as Ivan (Johann) V. Kargel, a Turkish subject who later became naturalised. Although Pavlov, Ivanov, and Kargel went to Hamburg and met with Oncken, yet the work in the Caucasus in its origins and leadership was indigenous.[10]

German Baptists did not relate to the Orthodox population in the Ukraine until after the stundist movement had started. If anything, Ukrainian stundists will reach out to Baptists rather than Baptists reaching out to them. Baptist influence among Ukrainian stundists did not take root until 1869-1870. Until then Ukrainian stundists knew little if anything about Baptists. The year 1869, however, will be a banner year for Baptist penetration. In June of that year a large baptism was held in Alt-Danzig, which included the baptism of Efim Tsimbal, a Ukrainian believer, who surreptitiously but illegally was immersed by Abraham Unger, who was

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[10] For information on the Kalweit and Voronin groups, see *Missionsblatt*, October, 1868, p. 160, and September 1869, pp. 129-32; *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, January, 1870, pp. 19-21; *Baptist*, 1927, no. 5, pp. 13-14, and *Bratskiĭ vestnik*. 1957, no. 28.

invited to officiate. Before the end of 1869 Tsimbal will immerse Ryaboshapka, and Ryaboshapka in 1871 will immerse Ratushnyï.[11]

In 1869 Johann Wieler will accompany Oncken to Odessa where he will remain, beginning a German-speaking church. But more important, he developed a close relationship with Ratushnyï and other stundists who were looking for help. With his relations with both Mennonite Brethren and German Baptists and his competency in both the German and Russian languages, he was in a strategic position to lead them. He counselled them to withdraw entirely from the Orthodox Church and form their own congregations. In 1870 he drew up *Pravila veroispovedaniya novoobrashchennago Russago Bratsva* (Regulations of the Confession of the Newly Converted Russian Brotherhood). It was a confessional statement of ten articles in conformity with the confession of the German Baptist Union but shortened and not an exact translation of it.[12] Even though the Russian authorities were greatly adverse to the acceptance by stundists of Baptist principles, in the face of persecution Ratushnyï and Ryaboshapka carried forth as Stundo-Baptist leaders. As Wieler wrote in 1874, 'Notwithstanding all persecutions, the awakening is spreading through the feeble instrumentality of simple brethren….'[13] The movement continued under indigenous leadership.

4.   Mladostundism

Although Ratushnyï and Ryaboshapka were now leaders of a Stundo-Baptist movement, it did not mean all stundists would follow them. A break occurred between Stundo-Baptists and other stundists, called Mladostundists (Young Stundists) or Novostundists (New Stundists), which shows that the stundist movement was not monolithic, included indigenous elements, and continued to negotiate its own way. The Mladostundists not only opposed the priesthood and the sacraments of the Orthodox Church but in addition rejected any new hierarchy or new rites. They wished to continue the original stundist pattern of devotional gatherings with all believers equal. They opposed the administrative role of the 'elder brother', one who might also appeal for money for mission trips and propaganda.[14]

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[11] For the Russian report on Tsimbal's baptism, see Aleksiï Dorodnitsyn, *Materialy dlya istorii religozno-ratsionalisticheskago dvizheniya na yuge Rossii vo vtoroï polovine xix-go stoletiya* (Kazan, 1908), doc. 58. For Pritzkau's reports, see *Quarterly Reporter*, October 1869, pp. 394-95, and July, 1870, p. 837.

[12] Lawrence Klippenstein, ed. and tr., 'Johann Wieler (1839-1889) Among Evangelicals: A New Source of Mennonites and Evangelicalism in Imperial Russia', *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, V (1987), pp. 49-50. For a copy of the *Pravila*, see Dorodnitsyn, document 301.

[13] *Quarterly Review*, July 1874, p. 6.

[14] See Rozhdestvenskiï, pp. 105-106, 174-75, 266-67, for the differences between the Mladostundists and Stundo-Baptists.

Mladostundists also spiritualised the ordinances of baptism and communion and opposed their observance. One of their leaders, Gerasim Balaban declared, 'Rites – this is theatre'. They argued that baptism was only an external sign that had no power; one must receive the living water and be baptised in the Spirit. Christ's baptism was for Himself alone. Also one does not receive Christ in the Lord's Supper but from Christ Himself and His Word. In time Baptists will modify somewhat Mladostundist practice, but nevertheless the division persisted for some time. In the end, however, the stundist movement will become Stundo-Baptist in its entirety.

At this point, it should be recognised that German Baptists took advantage of the evangelical movement already developing in the Russian Empire. They were not initiators of the movement but facilitators in moving it to what they considered were more consistent biblical principles such as separation from non-evangelical churches and believer's baptism by immersion. They took advantage of a religious situation that was turning in their favour. This was true for the Alf movement in Russian Poland and also for Mennonites, German stundists, Ukrainian stundists, and Molokans. They were at the right place at the right time.

5.   Indigenous Elements Today

Russian Evangelical Christians-Baptists exhibit their indigenous character today. This is seen particularly in their worship, whose tenor and pulsation significantly differ from the West. The intensity of worship, paralleling the reverence in the Orthodox Church, is serious and personal. Services last at least two hours, which include, besides the singing of hymns, sermons from three or four preachers and a number of choir anthems if not also special musical numbers. Stundists and Baptists adopted hymns from western evangelical sources, but they also compose hymns of their own. The services are also punctuated with periods of prayer. Worshippers kneel or, if no seats, stand. Men or women lead out in extemporaneous prayer with all joining in with a whispered undertone. Some worshippers observe the kiss of peace, confined to members of their own sex. Scriptures adorn the walls of the church, frequently including the phrase, 'God is Love'. As in the Orthodox tradition, Easter is the most important Christian holy day.

Baptists in Russia were never known for the strict Calvinism of many Regular Baptists in the West. Unlike their Southern Baptist brethren, many Russian Baptists tend to accept the prospect of falling from grace rather than belief in the security of the believer.

How indigenous are Russian Baptists? There is no easy answer. In origin or development they are simply not an implantation from another

nation or culture. On the other hand, Protestant as well as Baptist impulses from abroad have influenced them. As other religious movements, they too may be a hybrid. How much they incorporate foreign elements and how much they incorporate indigenous elements may simply be in the eye of the beholder.

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Is the Sermon on the Mount too unrealistic to Serve as a Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?

1.   Introduction

From the earliest origins of the Church to the present day, the Sermon on the Mount has continually challenged and inspired generations of Christ's followers to live out the kind of life which Jesus sets forth. As well as being 'one of the most lofty and powerful expressions of the essence of moral life'[1], the Sermon is a challenging call to follow Jesus by participating in the vision of the kingdom of God, which, as Christ declares, is now a present reality and accessible to all who receive his message (Matt. 4:17). Such are the ethical standards demanded by Christ in the Sermon, however, that it is hardly surprising that the history of its interpretation has been dominated by attempts to downplay its significance or to undermine its authenticity.[2] 'The interpretation of the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount', as David Garland aptly observes, 'has been marked by a tendency throughout history to attempt to moderate its radical demands.'[3] Such tendencies were present in the scholastic tradition originating in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, who posited a double standard for the laity and the clergy by distinguishing between Jesus' 'commandments' and 'counsels'. Whereas obedience to the commandments was necessary for salvation, the counsels were recommended as means of perfection and as ways of obtaining greater favour with God.[4] The Protestant tradition stemming from Martin Luther also contributed to the enervation of the Sermon's dynamic call to obedience. By maintaining a distinction between private and public morality, Luther contended that Jesus' teachings applied only to Christians in their private lives and not to their corporate or social lives. According to Luther, one's spiritual life is a matter between the

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[1] W. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1975), p. xi.

[2] For example, H. Betz's book, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), whose publication was regarded as a landmark in the history of the interpretation of the Sermon, claims that the Sermon is *not* a Christian text but is, rather, a compilation of pre-existing literature, which was incorporated by Matthew and Luke and added to their gospels as a foreign body in these otherwise coherent accounts of Jesus' life.

[3] D. Garland, in, *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible,* W. Mills (ed.) (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 810.

[4] Thomas wrote that, 'The difference between a counsel and a commandment is that a commandment implies obligation, whereas a counsel is left to the option of the one to whom it is given'. See, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas,* 5 volumes (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), volume ii, pp. 1118-1119. Kissinger argues (*Sermon on the Mount,* pp. 18-19) that under Thomas' influence, the distinction between 'counsels' and 'commandments' became a standard axiom of medieval moral theology.

individual and God, whereas one's moral obligations were divided among several parties: God, state, culture, etc. For instance, commenting on Jesus' teaching on resistance to evil in Matthew 5:38-42, Luther maintained that a follower of Christ 'lives simultaneously as a *Christian* toward everyone, personally suffering all sorts of things in the world, and as a *secular person,* maintaining, using and performing all the functions required by the law of his territory or city, by civil law, and by domestic law... A Christian should not resist any evil; but within the limits of his office, a secular person should oppose every evil.'[5]

Although such interpretations exerted a strong influence on the church, there arose a movement, associated with the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century, which rejected Luther's distinction between Christians' moral obligations to the state and their spiritual life in relation to God. Menno Simons, a significant leader of the early Anabaptists, insisted that obedience to Jesus' teachings in every sphere of life was indispensable to one's being a Christian. 'It is vain', maintained Simons, 'that we are called Christians, that Christ died, that we are born in the day of grace, and baptised with water, if we do not walk according to His law... and are not obedient to His word.'[6] Thus the Anabaptist historian, James Stayer, is correct in arguing that, for the Anabaptists, Jesus' sayings were not 'counsels of perfection', but 'absolute commands'.[7] In the twentieth century, however, the tendency to moderate the radical ethical demands of the Sermon was revived in the writings of the renowned ethicist, Reinhold Niebuhr. Niebuhr argued that the counsel to perfection in Matthew 5:48 ('be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect') is an impossible ideal to which humans should nevertheless strive because it represents the noblest conception and highest end of human moral endeavour.[8] The regrettable result of this 'hermeneutics of evasion' – as Glen Stassen calls it – has been the misguided assumption that Jesus' teachings are 'too high and too hard for us to follow, and so instead we should follow some other

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[5] See, *Luther's Works,* edited by J. Pelikan, 55 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), volume xxi, p. 113 (emphasis added).

[6] M. Simons, in, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, translated by L. Verduin, edited by J. C. Wenger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1956), p. 111.

[7] J. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1972), p. 37.

[8] *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought,* edited by A. Hastings, A. Mason and H. Pyper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 655. Niebuhr argues that even an 'impossible ethical ideal' can make a positive contribution to 'ordinary morality'. See, R. Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1948), p. 124. Several other interpretations which have sought to moderate the ethical demands of the Sermon could be mentioned but since this essay is offered as a positive contribution to this important debate of the moral efficacy of the Sermon, it seems superfluous to enumerate, one by one, such interpretations. For a helpful overview, see Loyd Allen, 'The Sermon on the Mount in the History of the Church', *Review and Expositor,* 89 (1992), pp. 245-266. For a more detailed and up-to-date account, see *The Sermon on the Mount through the Centuries,* edited by J. Greenman, T. Larsen, S. Spencer (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007).

pragmatic ethic'.[9]

At the root of such evasion lies an unexamined tendency to divorce spirituality from morality. My task is to think constructively about how these aspects of Christian life can be brought together under a vision of the kingdom of God which maintains that the ethical teachings of the Sermon on the Mount can and indeed ought to be practiced by all Christians. At the heart of this claim is the notion that *morality is embodied spirituality*[10] and that therefore discipleship refers to the practical moral outworking of an inner process of spiritual formation which takes place at the deepest level of human character and identity.[11] I am aided in my task by many who have probed deeply into the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount and who have provided practical and conceptual models which continue to enhance our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus in the contemporary context. The two most valuable guides have been Glen Stassen and James McClendon, who in this essay I will bring into dialogue with each other. My aim is to build on their insights in order to develop a vision of how the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount can be used today as a resource for healthy spiritual formation and discipleship. The argument throughout will be that the Sermon is indeed a realistic resource for such a vision which corresponds to the implied critical argument that any attempt to argue to the contrary constitutes an unwarranted attempt to evade the duty of obedience to the teachings of Christ.

2.   'Transforming Initiatives', 'Powerful Practices' and the Kingdom Vision: Stassen and McClendon in Conversation

Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary has been at the forefront of recent efforts to understand the relevance of the moral teachings of the Sermon on the Mount for the life of Jesus' contemporary followers.[12] For

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[9] G. Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999), p. 33. cf. G. Stassen and D. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 133.

[10] I am indebted to my teacher, Dr P. Parushev, for this insight.

[11] James McClendon uses the word 'convictions' to describe those 'gusty beliefs that I live out' which are an integral part of human self-identity. See, J. W. McClendon, Jr, *Systematic Theology: Volume I: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 22.

[12] The seriousness with which Stassen takes the problem of the neglect of Christian ethicists to use the Sermon on the Mount as a practical guide for living is seen by the fact that the preface to his major work on Christian ethics, which he co-authored with David Gushee, has the subtitle 'The Problem: The Evasion of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount' (*Kingdom Ethics,* xi-xvi). For Stassen it seems that the evasion of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon constitutes one of the most significant failures of contemporary Christian ethics. Stassen and Gushee regret that in their survey of textbooks in Christian ethics they were 'amazed to find that almost none learned anything constructive from the Sermon on the Mount' (*Kingdom Ethics,* xii). This essay is offered as a contribution to the wider ongoing attempt being made to rediscover the moral relevance of the Sermon on the Mount.

Stassen, these teachings are a realistic resource for discipleship because they can be hermeneutically reappropriated into the language of moral norms which can guide human conduct in the present-day context. With David Gushee, Stassen argues that the Sermon's teaching consists of 'fourteen triads', each of which contains a teaching on: (1) traditional righteousness; (2) a vicious cycle; and (3) a transforming initiative.[13] Stassen argues that Jesus' teachings are not about prohibitions but about imparting life through a vision of the kingdom of God, which, as Jesus announced, is already 'at hand' (Matt. 4:17). Thus Stassen maintains that the Sermon is 'first of all about what God *is already doing.* It is about God's grace, God's loving deliverance *from* various kinds of bondage.'[14] It is through the third part of the triad, the 'transforming initiatives', that Jesus' life-giving teaching is made accessible to his disciples. A transforming initiative is 'a way of deliverance based on grace'[15], which involves Christians 'participating in God's active presence and God's grace'.[16] Therefore, Jesus first diagnoses a problem and then explains the harmful consequences that result from it. Only then does he offer specific guidance about how to transform the situation with practices characteristic of life in God's kingdom. As Stassen and Gushee point out from their linguistic analysis of the Greek text of the Sermon, Jesus' transforming initiatives are permeated throughout with imperatives. For instance, in Matthew 5:24-25, they identify five specific words or expressions which are given in the imperative: 'leave', 'go', 'be reconciled', 'offer', 'make friends'.[17] These are exactly the kind of transforming initiatives which, Stassen argues, form the crux of Jesus' ethical teachings. Most importantly in terms of discipleship and spiritual formation is Stassen's conception of these initiatives as 'practices', as actions that people deliberately *do* in order to achieve the desired outcome which leads to individual and social transformation.

What, more specifically, do these initiatives aim to achieve? To answer this question, Stassen reverts to the prophet Isaiah, who depicts the coming reign of God and the characteristics of God's kingdom. Stassen identifies 'seventeen deliverance passages' in Isaiah, each of which speaks of one or more of the following characteristics: 'deliverance or salvation'; 'righteousness or justice'; 'God's presence as Spirit or Light'; 'healing'; and 'return from exile'.[18] Such characteristics correspond to specific

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[13] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics,* p. 135. See also, G. Stassen, 'The fourteen triads of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-7:12)', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003), pp. 267-308.

[14] G. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount* (San Francisco: John Wiley, 2006), p. 8.

[15] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics,* p. 136.

[16] Ibid., p. 140.

[17] Ibid., p. 135.

[18] Ibid., p. 25.

practices of people who are living in God's already existing reign as active participants in the kingdom vision. These are the practices which Jesus commands his followers to *do,* for it is only by doing them (rather than merely preaching about them) that one can go 'beyond the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees' (Matt. 5:20). These acts are realistic and attainable precisely because they are nothing more than specific practices that characterise the kingdom of God, which is a present reality for Jesus' followers. For instance, when Jesus commands his hearers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44), he reinforces this command with a *practice,* prayer ('pray for those who persecute you'), which corresponds to the peace which is a characteristic of God's reign.

It may be objected, however, that Jesus does not always offer a transforming initiative. This is certainly true in the case of Jesus' teaching on divorce (Matt. 5:31-32). Stassen argues, however, that the lack of such a transforming initiative on this subject in the Sermon on the Mount is supplied by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, in which the apostle commands his readers who were married to 'be reconciled' (1 Cor. 7:10-11).[19] In other cases, Jesus' command may seem unrealistic or even absurd, as in the case of Jesus' advice to those who lust to pluck out their eyes or to cut off their right hand (Matthew 5:29-30). On this point Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers a helpful perspective. He argues that since it is impossible to take the command either literally or non-literally, 'we are placed in a position where there is no alternative but to obey (Christ)'. Jesus maintains that those who obey him will be 'sons of (their) Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 5:45).[20] Thus, Jesus' followers participate *now* in the life of the kingdom of God in such a way as to translate the internalised spirituality of the Beatitudes into moral action based on obedience to the kingdom vision set out by Christ. Stassen explains that 'the virtues of the participants (in the 'drama of the reign of God') fit the drama: we participate now and will be participating in God's merciful, compassionate deliverance'.[21]

We may conclude, therefore, that for Stassen the Sermon is a vision of life in the kingdom of God.[22] His confidence in the moral efficacy of the Sermon on the Mount is related to his belief that this vision of the life in the kingdom of God can be translated into ethical norms which can govern a moral form of life through the practice of Jesus' transforming initiatives.

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[19] Stassen, *Living the Sermon,* p. 78.

[20] D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* translated by R. Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 120.

[21] Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics,* p. 47.

[22] By emphasising the centrality of the kingdom of God, Stassen adds his impetus to the growing list of scholarly works which have likewise stressed the importance of the kingdom of God in understanding the Sermon. See, for instance, D. Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998); and, D. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p. 17.

By bringing Jesus' commands down to the level of specific practices, Stassen's notion of transforming initiatives takes us beyond the misguided belief that Jesus is teaching 'high ideals' or 'lovely sentiments but impossible for practical living'.[23] This 'deceptively simple'[24] approach avoids the traditional twin pitfalls of Christian spiritual formation: 'cheap grace' and legalism. It may be costly to practice such transforming initiatives as praying for one's enemies or to turn one's cheek to an assailant; but because it is costly does not mean that it is impossible. By taking Jesus seriously as a prophetic voice for radical moral living, Stassen has done a great service to Jesus' contemporary followers.

Despite the great advances made by Stassen, however, there are aspects of his analysis which remain undeveloped and which would profit from further probing. For instance, whilst he provides an account of how Jesus' teachings can be individually applied to specific circumstances in terms of transforming initiatives, *he does not explain how the separate practices cohere to create a vision of kingdom life.* For an understanding of how the Sermon could provide such a vision, James McClendon, in his three-volume *Systematic Theology,* offers valuable insights. Although McClendon does not write primarily as a theologian of the spiritual life, his ideas often provoke his readers into a reflection on how such concepts such as 'the baptist vision' and 'powerful practices' could be used to provide a vision of life in the kingdom of God which would be serviceable to Christians looking for a workable model for spiritual growth from the Sermon. It is also true that whilst McClendon does not apply his methodology to the Sermon itself, he nevertheless leaves the way open for others to do so.[25] It is this challenge which I will now take on by bringing McClendon into conversation with Glen Stassen.

The great merit of McClendon is his visionary approach to the recasting of theological problems away from abstract speculation to actual engagement with the embodied life of the faith community, which for McClendon is the proper starting point for all theological reflection.[26] In the first pages of his great systematic project, McClendon articulates his 'baptist vision'. McClendon defines this vision as an 'hermeneutical principle', which maintains 'a shared awareness of the present Christian community as the primitive community and the eschatological

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[23] Ibid., p. 132.

[24] Ibid., p. 133.

[25] In, *Systematic Theology: Volume 2: Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp. 132-133, McClendon alludes to the potential for the Sermon to serve as a corrective force against destructive practices which distort the vision of the kingdom of God. He does not, however, (as he does with the Ten Commandments in *Ethics,* pp. 182-189) explain how the Sermon could be applied in such a way.

[26] J.W. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (Eugene: Wimpf & Stock, 1974), pp. 149, 170. See also, McClendon, *Ethics,* pp. 23, 34-44; *Doctrine,* pp. 41-48.

community'.[27] It follows that 'the church now is the primitive church; we are Jesus' followers; *the commands are addressed directly to us*'.[28] According to the logic of this vision, the Sermon on the Mount has a living relevance for disciples of Jesus today because the way of life described by Jesus becomes embodied in the life of the church today, according to McClendon, through the practices of the faith community. Thus, 'the biblical story has present, not merely antiquarian relevance'.[29]

The most pertinent application of McClendon's vision to our examination is to be found in his discussion of 'powerful practices'.[30] McClendon credits the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre with the insight that 'the virtues of the common life depend upon the existence of common human social practices, and these in turn upon a narrative understanding of life'.[31] This notion derives from an Aristotelian understanding of the teleological function of practices as disciplines of habit which engender virtue through the cultivation of character.[32] Practices, therefore, have significant relevance for the moral life. According to McClendon, morality is expressed in the form of practices performed by a particular community. The teachings of Jesus, therefore, are realistic because of the potential for character formation within the context of a community which embodies and enacts the vision of the kingdom through such practices. This vision is guided throughout by a narrative account of God's interaction with human beings, which began with the first man, Adam, and continued to Christ and to the present day and beyond. This ongoing narrative gives coherence to the practices of the faith community because it invites people to participate in the living out of the kingdom vision.[33]

However, McClendon criticises the 'generally optimistic and progressive ring of MacIntyre's overall account of practices'[34] and warns of the potential danger, inherent in powerful practices, of distorting the kingdom vision by not relying solely on the kind of power that is (in the words of John Howard Yoder) 'in conformity with the victory of the

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[27] McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 30. McClendon's use of the lower case 'b' in baptist, rather than the upper case 'B', is quite deliberate. McClendon wants to emphasise that the vision which he advocates is not confined to a specific 'Baptist' denomination, but encompasses a whole range of expressions of Christianity, associated with the tradition of the Radical Reformation. See, McClendon, *Ethics,* pp. 26-34.

[28] Ibid., p. 32 (emphasis added).

[29] Ibid., p. 31.

[30] Ibid., pp. 172-191; *Doctrine,* pp. 132-133.

[31] *Ethics,* p. 168.

[32] For an account of the application of Aristotelian virtue theory to social ethics, see Tammy Williams' article, 'After Racism', in, *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition,* N. Murphy, B. Kallenberg and M. Nation (eds.) (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1997), pp. 278-279.

[33] For a succinct account of McClendon's holistic vision, see McClendon, *Biography as Theology,* pp. 1-23.

[34] Ibid., p. 178.

Lamb'.[35] In order to avoid such distortion, the kind of practices that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount are those which conform to what McClendon calls 'the character of the expected realm'.[36] This new reign of God 'was to be a new order of interactive love – God's love to people, and people's love one to another, even to enemies'.[37] The power of McClendon's baptist vision lies in the notion that these characteristics of the kingdom vision as described by Jesus are embodied in the life of the faith community today which lives in obedience to the kinds of practices that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount. According to McClendon's baptist vision, therefore, the Sermon on the Mount can be read as a cluster of practices (such as forgiveness[38] and peacemaking[39]) which together constitute a vision of life in the kingdom of God.

It is here that McClendon's vision can be used to complement something that is not quite clear from Stassen's analysis – a vision of how the separate transforming practices outlined in the Sermon on the Mount can be brought together into a coherent vision of spiritual growth in terms of participation in the life of the present reality of the kingdom of God. Whereas Stassen begins with a description of the actual practices that characterise the vision of the kingdom, he does not seek to provide such a vision into which these separate practices could cohere. McClendon's baptist vision supplies this deficit. By arguing for the continuity of the experience of the early church with that of the present church, McClendon maintains that the disciples of Jesus' time are today's disciples.[40] With this narrative understanding of the kingdom vision, McClendon asserts that 'what is indispensable for making any society *one* society is that it shall have a narrative tradition whose function is to provide a setting for several practices of that society, one that unites them in a single web of meaning'.[41] McClendon's approach, therefore, starts out with the unifying vision and examines how the practices of the faith community fit into this vision.

The shortcoming of this approach, however, is that in his emphasis on vision, he sometimes fails to explain why it is that the practices outlined in the Sermon on the Mount have normative value as individual moral acts. For instance, in the final part of *Ethics,* McClendon considers whether pacifism is a realistic ethical stance for Christians today, and after considering the matter from the standpoint of Jesus, and subsequently

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[35] J. H. Yoder, quoted in, ibid., p. 182. See also, *Virtues and Practices,* edited by N. Murphy et al, p. 94.

[36] Ibid., p. 67.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., pp. 213-241.

[39] Ibid., pp. 301-324.

[40] McClendon writes (*Doctrine,* p. 395) that 'by the baptist vision our task is not mere replication of primitive Christian behaviours, but acting in our own context with an understanding of what we do formed by our identity with Jesus' first disciples'.

[41] McClendon, *Ethics,* p. 177.

refuting the arguments against pacifism, he then argues that it is indeed possible for Jesus' followers to be peacemakers today in accordance with Jesus' teaching on the Sermon on the Mount.[42] Thus McClendon argues that Jesus 'evoked and guided a program of nonviolent action that transformed human conduct for its participants' and that the 'core of that program lies in the Sermon on the Mount'.[43] What is lacking from his argument, however, is any explanation of *why* the practice of peacemaking is a moral norm. This deficit, conversely, is supplied by Glen Stassen who argues persistently that transforming initiatives are moral norms derived from the Beatitudes.[44] In contrast to McClendon, Stassen, as we have already discussed, gives considerable explicit attention to the crucial question of how these moral norms translate into practical guidance for spiritual formation through Jesus' 'transforming initiatives'.

We can conclude, therefore, that what is lacking in Stassen's account (a discussion of how the separate transforming initiatives of the Sermon on the Mount can be brought together under a guiding vision of spiritual growth) can be supplied by McClendon's 'baptist vision'; and that, conversely, what is rather unclear in McClendon's argument (the issue of the normative value of Jesus' teachings) is elucidated by Stassen's thoughtful and detailed consideration of this issue. It may be objected, however, that such a synthesis is much too abstract to provide a workable model for spiritual growth that will be of service to today's disciples. In order to counter this criticism, the next part will test the hypothesis by examining the ways in which these findings relate to the actual process of spiritual formation.

3.   Discipleship as the Embodiment of the Kingdom Vision

Having used the ideas of Stassen and McClendon to construct a synthetic understanding of how the Sermon might be used as a living resource for discipleship and healthy spiritual formation, it is now time to revert back to the aforementioned definition of morality as 'embodied spirituality'. Since discipleship involves a process of learning to participate in the life of the kingdom of God as it is described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, it follows that discipleship can be defined as *the embodiment of the vision of the kingdom of God,* which Jesus himself personified. This idea points to a central idea of the spiritual life – that the moral life of a disciple is guided

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[42] Ibid., p. 301-324.
[43] Ibid., p. 309.
[44] See, Stassen, *Just Peacemaking.*

primarily not by reason, but by a vision,[45] and that virtue is acquired not solely through contemplation but also by participating in practices which aim towards the *telos* of human life.[46] The moral force of a vision consists in the potential for it to be hermeneutically reappropriated to a contemporary context in such a way as to provide a framework for spiritual growth which is derived directly from the teachings of Jesus. Such a vision has normative claims because it is based on the authority of Scripture itself, which, as McClendon's says, is no less 'God speaking'.[47] Furthermore, according to the logic of the baptist vision, it is clear that McClendon takes the view that Jesus' words are addressed as directly to today's followers as they were to Jesus' original hearers.

McClendon's apparent lack (in his three-volume *Systematic Theology*) of any mention of the normative value of the practices which give substance to the vision, is to some extent supplied by some of his more occasional writings. In a series of sermons published under the title, *Making Gospel Sense,* McClendon begins to apply (albeit in a vestigial way) normative categories to some of the inferences he draws from the teachings of the Scriptures.[48] For instance, in addressing a troubled church in which the relations 'between the pastor and some members... had reached breaking point',[49] McClendon spoke of what he called 'the *practice of forgiveness*'.[50] Even though McClendon does not use such vocabulary, it is nevertheless implied in his argument that the practice of loving and forgiving a sinning church member is 'normatively binding' because it is, as he puts it, 'the Rule of Christ'.[51] Although he takes a passage from Genesis 50 as his point of departure, he cites the practice, referred to by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, of making peace with one's neighbour before bringing one's gift to the altar. 'If we celebrate this meal', said McClendon, 'according to our regular practice, after Scripture is read and the sermon preached, our offerings will be brought to the table, with the

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[45] Unfortunately I do not have time or space to defend this argument here. Thankfully, however, the notion that the moral life is guided primarily by vision has already been persuasively argued for in the PhD thesis of my teacher, P. R. Parushev, 'Walking in the Dawn of the Light: On the Salvation Ethics of the Ecclesial Communities in the Orthodox Tradition from a Radical Reformation Perspective' (PhD Thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 2006), available through Proquest UMI NO. 3260231. See pages 60-120 for an account of the way in which Matthew's kingdom vision can be used as a framework for the moral life of the present-day faith community.

[46] In an article entitled, 'Three Strands of Christian Ethics', *Journal of Religious Ethics,* 6 (1978), pp. 54-80, McClendon draws on the insights of Aristotle, Aquinas and Hauerwas to argue that, action is 'logically inseparable from the forms of community, in particular from the shared forms of language, while the notion of a responsible choice-maker or agent was tied to the continuity of selfhood which we call character' (pp. 71-72).

[47] McClendon, *Doctrine,* p. 40.

[48] J. W. McClendon, *Making Gospel Sense* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1995).

[49] Ibid., p. 3.

[50] Ibid., p. 7 (emphasis added).

[51] Ibid.

bread and wine of our meal, and we will say together a certain prayer.'[52] McClendon realised the forgiving power that is inherent in such 'regular practices' as sharing a meal together at the Lord's table or praying in unity.[53]

Complementing McClendon's emphasis on the way in which the kingdom vision is embodied (or, indeed, distorted)[54] in the practices of the faith community, Stassen refers to the normative necessity of the practice of forgiveness in terms of the individual. He declares bluntly that anyone 'who does not live by forgiveness must have some other kind of religion and should not be called a Christian'.[55] From Jesus' teachings on the Sermon on the Mount, Stassen posits the following norm: 'Do not be the kind of person who regularly condemns others, but the kind of person who regularly practices forgiveness and repentance.'[56] He then offers a series of short stories arising out his own experience in order to illustrate the ways in which the norm of forgiveness becomes embodied in practices.[57] McClendon also cannot be charged with totally failing to provide a justification for the normative value of forgiveness as a central community practice, for he asserts that forgiveness 'sets the character of Christian community, just as the imperatives of the Decalogue had pointed a direction with regard to Israel's community practices'.[58] The normative value of the practice of forgiveness arises out of the central place that Jesus assigns to it in the Sermon on the Mount. Forgiveness, as well as other related practices of peacemaking, praying and loving one's enemies, are part of the kingdom vision around which they all cohere.

These practices of discipleship, moreover, are to some extent interrelated. For example, a former leader of the Bruderhof community,[59] J. H. Arnold, demonstrated how the practice of forgiveness and reconciliation is related to Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce. In one of his letters, Arnold gives the following wise counsel: 'we should not come to prayer or partake of the Lord's Supper unless there is complete peace among us. Too often it happens that things are left unresolved when people pray together.

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[52] Ibid., p. 8.

[53] In his essay, 'The Practice of Community Formation', McClendon provides a more developed argument for the importance of the Lord's Supper as a community practice. See, *Virtues and Practices,* edited by Murphy et al, pp. 91-93.

[54] See, McClendon, *Ethics,* pp. 178-182, for an account of how practices can become sinful, thereby distorting the kingdom vision. Stassen, too, is aware of the potential danger of practices becoming destructive. In *Living the Sermon* (p. 155), for instance, Stassen refers to those sinful activities which Christians must 'repent from practising'.

[55] Stassen, *Living the Sermon,* p. 155.

[56] Ibid., p. 154.

[57] Ibid., pp. 155-165.

[58] McClendon, in *Virtues and Practices,* edited by Murphy et al, p. 102.

[59] For a candid historical account of the way of life of the Bruderhof, see, M. Mow, *Torches Rekindled: the Bruderhof's Struggle for Renewal* (Rifton: Plough Publishing, 1989).

But communal life will not endure like that, *and neither will marriage*.'[60] Since Arnold was part of the Bruderhof community, which quite deliberately and self-consciously based its life on Jesus' teachings in the Sermon, his writings are particularly instructive. He maintained that his community sought 'to take Christ's words on the Sermon on the Mount literally and be measured and judged by them'.[61] For Arnold and the Bruderhof, therefore, the Sermon provided the framework for the moral vision of the community which 'found vivid expression in every area of life'.[62] The normative value of their community practices came by assuming that the Sermon was accepted as a standard and realistic guide for every sphere of their moral life.

It may be shown, therefore, that spirituality can be expressed in a kingdom vision which becomes embodied in practices. If these practices are modelled on Jesus' teaching in the Sermon they thereby acquire normative value because they embody precisely that vision of moral life that Jesus set forth.

4.   Conclusion

From both Stassen and McClendon, therefore, we gain valuable insights into how Jesus' teachings on the Sermon might be used as a realistic resource for discipleship and healthy spiritual formation. Stassen provides a helpful analysis of Jesus' teachings, arguing persuasively for their normative value and asserting and illustrating their applicability to the contemporary context. McClendon, on the other hand, provides us with a 'baptist vision' which maintains that Jesus' moral teachings can be typologically recast into the contemporary context to provide a framework for moral living for Christ's present-day followers. This vision also provides a unifying focus into which all the transforming initiatives of Stassen cohere.

Many questions requiring further elucidation arise from this paper, each of which invites discussion from a variety of perspectives. For instance, how might the conceptual synthesis of Stassen's normative practices and McClendon's baptist vision be applied constructively at the grass roots level of congregational life? Could this synthesis be applied to the wider society or is it restricted to the moral life of the church? How can the 'narrative approach' of both McClendon and Stassen be used to clarify some of the issues raised in this paper? Also, what potential for mission

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[60] J. H. Arnold, *Discipleship: Living for Christ in the Daily Grind* (Farmington: Plough Publishing, 1994), p. 122 (emphasis added).
[61] Ibid., p. 100.
[62] Ibid., p. 84.

arises out of this understanding of Jesus' words as an invitation to participate in the vision of the present reality of the kingdom of God? These are questions that arise from this paper and which need to be picked up by other scholars if the church is to continue in the process of the rediscovery of the relevance and applicability of the Sermon's teachings to the contemporary context. It is impossible to avoid these questions, for as Stassen and others have pointed out, one of the foremost tasks imposed upon theological ethicists today is to lead the church in the process of the rediscovery of the Sermon as a reliable and realistic guide to discipleship and healthy spiritual formation. It is my hope that this paper will contribute in its own way to such a rediscovery or that it might, at least, prompt others to engage further with the issues raised regarding Jesus' life-giving words, spoken on the mountainside to the admiration of his hearers (Matt. 7:28). Once we hear these words as the living Word spoken to our own context, it is my hope that the church will not merely admire Jesus' teachings but that it would be challenged to practice everything which Jesus commanded it to do, thereby fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20).

Joshua Thomas Searle is a research student at Trinity College, Dublin in Ireland and an MTh in applied theology alumnus of IBTS.

Christian Mission in an Orthodox Context

Each year IBTS, Prague, offers a series of conferences and research colloquia designed to bring academic and practical theologians together from different countries within the European Baptist Federation (EBF) to discuss important themes at the heart of the contemporary life and mission of Christian faith communities. Considering the prospects and challenges of mission encounters of Baptist and Orthodox Christians in culturally Orthodox contexts, Doc Dr Parush Parushev, Tim Noble and Lina Andronovienė, are offering a research colloquium in 2009 on the subject:

Christian Mission in an Orthodox Context: Canonical territories, religious freedom and issues of proselytism
8 – 11 February 2009

The aim of the colloquium is to address points of tension and opportunities for enriching Christian witness to the secularised European contexts which have a majority Orthodox religious presence. The specific goal of the organisers is to deal with key concepts of Orthodox and evangelical theological perspectives such as the Orthodox understanding of Canonical territories, evangelical emphasis on religious freedom and differing views on issues of proselytism. It is expected that the participants will attend to differing conceptual viewpoints from within the broader understanding of their ecclesiologies, traditions of church practice and understandings of the relationship between church and state or territory. This suggests both theological and practical points of encounter and how to deal with differences in a creative way which enables holistic Christian cooperation in responding to *Missio Dei*.

The colloquium will begin from 16.00 on 8 February, and will end after lunch on 11 February 2009.

We are approaching speakers to make key presentations. If you wish to offer a contribution, please contact Dr Parushev, e-mail: Parushev@ibts.eu. If you wish to book for this academic event, to be held at IBTS in Prague, please contact Vanessa Lake, e-mail: Lake@ibts.eu.

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